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CHAPTER 26

ISAIAH IN LATIN

ANNI MARIA LAATO

26.1. INTRODUCTION

THE book of Isaiah, mainly in Latin translations, has been used and studied in the West for over a thousand years, and by many of the most important theologians there. The importance of these translations for Christian theology and praxis, therefore, cannot be overestimated.¹

Christianity spread to the West in the first century, especially through merchants and other travelers to the Mediterranean coasts. The Latinization of the West at that time meant that Latin was commonly understood and used even by those who did not speak it as their mother tongue; however in many areas, other languages remained the first language. In the church in the city of Rome, for example, mainly Greek was spoken up until the turn of the third century. In other areas, however, many Christians had no or only limited knowledge of Greek, and thus a need for Latin translations of biblical texts and the liturgy arose. This was the case particularly in North Africa, and consequently, the first evidence of Latin translations of biblical texts is found in this area. The first Latin translations emerged in the second century, first orally and then in written form.

The Latin West adopted the Old Testament in its Greek form, the Septuagint, which for centuries was regarded as authoritative, and which, prior to Jerome's Vulgate, served as the basis of all Latin translations. Eventually, however, the use of Latin translations based on Greek translations became problematic. The Latin versions were sometimes observed to be inaccurate and unreliable—this became apparent especially in discussions with the Jews—and their language and syntax were thought to be of poor quality, which irritated well-educated people, in particular. This led to a need to produce a reliable high-quality translation, a task that Jerome, at the end of the fourth century, undertook. Despite its apparent merits, the Vulgate, however, was not immediately adopted

¹ These translations are published in *Vetus Latina, die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel*, and *Biblia Sacra iuxta Latinam Vulgatam versionem*.



by the church, and older traditions lived on for a long time alongside it, especially in liturgical use and in hymns.

As in the Christian East, the book of Isaiah was regarded as one of the most important books of the Old Testament, even in the West.² It was read first and foremost Christologically—that is, as containing promises, prophecies, and types of Christ and the church. Jerome summarizes this view in the Prologue to his translation of Isaiah in the Vulgate, characterizing the prophet Isaiah as follows:

[H]e should be called an evangelist rather than a prophet because he describes all the mysteries of Christ and the Church so clearly that you would think he is composing a history of what has already happened rather than prophesying about what is to come

Another example of the centrality of the book of Isaiah in Christian teaching in the Latin West is given by Augustine, who in *Conf* 9.5.13 thinks back to his youth and recollects how, in the autumn of 386, before his baptism, he asked Ambrose's advice about which book of the Scripture he should read to prepare himself to "understand and receive God's grace." Ambrose told him to read Isaiah, but Augustine found the book difficult and soon put it down. Later, however, when Augustine was considering why Ambrose had only recommended Isaiah, he concluded that it must have been because Isaiah "predicts the truth of the Gospel and liberation of the nations" more clearly than other Old Testament writers.

26.2. VETUS LATINA

In this chapter, the Latin translations of the texts of Isaiah before Jerome's Vulgate will be presented. First, an overview is given, and then the history of Vetus Latina, with special focus on the Book of Isaiah, is offered.

26.2.1. Overview

Vetus Latina (the Old Latin version, sometimes also called *pre-Vulgate*) is a collective name used to refer to all the Latin translations of biblical text that preceded Jerome's Vulgate.³ During the first centuries, no single authorized version of the Latin Scripture existed; instead, there were several different translations, none of which was better regarded than the others. According to current view, however, these translations were

² Childs, *Struggle*, 5, 92; Sawyer, *Fifth Gospel*, 1–2, 21, 48–50.

³ For the history of *Vetus Latina* texts, see Schultz-Flügel, *Latin Old Testament Tradition*; Stummer, *Einführung*; and Houghton, *Latin New Testament*.

originally probably not independent from each other, but emerged from a single version of each book. Because of their deficits and problems, these early translations were revised and updated from time to time, which led to the emergence of several different text-types. At the beginning of the fifth century, there thus existed several versions of Latin translations, as Augustine and Jerome witness. The terms *Afra* and *Itala*, earlier thought to denote the African or Italian origins of these translations, cannot—in the light of recent scholarship—be connected to certain geographical areas with respect to their origins. *Vetus Latina* text-types can, however, be classified under two main groups, the African and the European, according to their occurrence in texts of the Church Fathers. An example of the complexity is given by Augustine, who in *Doct. chr.* 2.15.22 gives preference to what he calls the “Italian” translation (which he calls *Itala*). It has, however, been impossible to identify any specific “Italian” version in his texts, and in fact, he often uses the African version.

The *Vetus Latina* texts of Isaiah are published in *Vetus Latina* 12/1–12/2 (1987–1997, edited by Roger Gryson).⁴ In these volumes, the text-types and sources are presented. The texts of *Vetus Latina* translations are preserved in the writings of the Church Fathers: treatises, sermons, letters, and commentaries. The *Vetus Latina* edition also includes the so-called *Hexapla of Jerome* (385 onward). With respect to commentaries of Isaiah, Jerome mentions a commentary on Isaiah by Victorinus of Pettau, but it is lost, as is most of Ambrose’s commentary, of which only a few fragments have been preserved. Jerome’s *Commentary on Isaiah* (written ca. 408–410), however, gives important information on *Vetus Latina*.

The first Latin translations of the texts of Isaiah were presumably made orally ad hoc, when needed for the purposes of teaching, preaching, and the liturgy. Soon, however, written translations emerged. The relation between the oral and written versions can be discussed: the oral translations were probably stylized before being written down.

The translators of *Vetus Latina* versions remain anonymous. It is clear that they were not highly educated and trained in translation, and were probably preachers and theologians who had knew every-day Greek as well as Latin, and who needed Latin translations for practical purposes. Their translations contain vernacular words and stylistic features. Contrary to what in antiquity was the common *ad sensum* principle, one of the principles of the translators often gave word-to-word translation, when possible, which means that the Greek word order is sometimes discernible. In the process of translating the Christian message and texts into Latin, new words based on Greek words were sometimes created, and old Greek words were given new meanings. Sometimes these translations took certain liberties with the original text, and errors were even made.

Their early age makes these early Latin translations important witnesses not only for the Greek textual traditions that served as a basis for the translations, which partly no longer exist, but also for Latin patristic exegesis and the development of the Latin language. They further provide help in identifying and locating anonymous early texts.

⁴ *Vetus Latina* 12.



The history of these texts even provides information on the early Christian communities in which they were produced and used.

26.2.2. History of *Vetus Latina*

The earliest mention of Latin translations of some New Testament texts is probably in *Acta Scillitanorum* (180 CE). It witnesses a group of Latin-speaking martyrs carrying Paul's letters and some other holy texts. The first evidence of translations of the Old Testament in Latin are, however, found in the works of Tertullian (those written from 196 CE onward). His writings contain numerous quotations from or allusions to biblical texts, among them many of the texts in Isaiah. In *Adversus Marcionem* alone, there are more than three hundred quotations from Isaiah. Tertullian was bilingual and occasionally translated ad hoc from Greek. His writings, however, also witness earlier archaic forms of Latin translations, and therefore his quotations form the earliest main textual type of *Vetus Latina* versions. These quotations are not identical with the later so-called African text found in, for example, Cyprian's texts. From the same time, the texts of Novatian testify to another text-type, which differs from Tertullian's. The *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, which contains one important passage that may refer to the book of Isaiah and which shall be discussed later in the chapter, comes from the time of Tertullian.

An example of the problems with the early translations is the question of how to translate the Christian theologically important word *logos*, which in Latin could be translated as *verbum* (word), *sermo* (speech), or even *ratio* (sense, intellect). Tertullian constantly uses the word *sermo*, for example, when he quotes Isa 2:3. He explains his translation in *Prax.* 5.2–4, and points to the praxis of older Christian translations, *usus nostrorum* (cf. *Or.* 1.1). Later translations, such as the African text in Cyprian, most often use *verbum*, which was easier to interpret as pointing to Christ as the Word.

From the third century, the most important witness of the Latin text of Isaiah is Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258). His *Testimoniorum libri III ad Quirinum* (249/250) is an important source for an ancient African text-form of the Scripture. It contains many lengthy quotations of an existing translation of Isaiah. A very similar text-form is found in other African treatises, for example, the Pseudo-Cyprianic text *De montibus Sina et Sion*, which also contains quotations from Isaiah and is probably earlier than Cyprian.⁵ Later revisions of this translation can be found in the writings of the Donatists.

From the fourth century, the most important evidence comes from Hilary of Poitiers and Ambrose. Their version, the so-called European text, differs from the African when it comes to the vocabulary used and the Greek original upon which it is based. Ambrose knew Greek, used several Latin and Greek versions, and sometimes even corrected the biblical text, but he never argued that a new Latin translation would be necessary.

⁵ Laato, *Jews and Christians*, 21.

Contemporaneously with Jerome, Augustine was interested in the problems of the Latin text. During different periods of his life, he used different versions, compared them with each other and commented on the translations critically. In *De doctrina Christiana*, written in 396–397, Augustine discusses the Latin translations of the Old Testament at length, their advantages, problems, and sources. For him, the Septuagint was authoritative and inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the existence of several Latin translations was not problematic (*Doct. chr.* 2.11–16). He was, however, aware of the necessity of knowing Greek and Hebrew to gain a correct understanding of the Scripture, even if he himself mainly operated on the basis of the Latin translations (*Doct. chr.* 2.11). His description of the number and origins of the Latin versions, however, is not to be taken quite literally:

For the translations of the Scriptures from Hebrew into Greek can be counted, but the Latin translators are out of all number. For in the early days of the faith every man who happened to get his hands upon a Greek manuscript, and who thought he had any knowledge, were it ever so little, of the two languages, ventured upon the work of translation. (*Doct. chr.* 2.11)

Augustine gives Isa 58:7 as an example of the benefit of using two Latin translations of the same verse, and despite his criticism, he considers Jerome's translation a good one. One of the two translations follows the Septuagint, "you shall not neglect any of the relatives of your seed" (*et domesticos seminis tui ne despexeris*); the other is found in the Vulgate "you shall not neglect your flesh" (*et carnem tuam ne despexeris*). Together, these translations produce, according to him, a correct understanding of about whom Isaiah is speaking: a relative (*consanguis*).

Augustine's second example is Isa 7:9, which in the European version of *Vetus Latina* is "if you will not believe, you shall not understand" (*nisi credideritis, non intellegitis*), and in the Vulgate is "if you will not believe, you shall not abide" (*nisi credideritis, non permanebitis*). Jerome's translation is based on the original Hebrew word play; the *Vetus Latina* translation is based on the Septuagint, which has combined this verse with Isa 6:9. According to Augustine, both translations are true and can be combined. He says, "Now which of these is the literal translation cannot be ascertained without reference to the text in the original tongue. And yet to those who read with knowledge, a great truth is to be found in each. For it is difficult for interpreters to differ so widely as not to touch at some point." The *Vetus Latina* translation of this verse expresses Augustine's understanding of the relation between faith and reason; it was therefore very popular in Latin Christian literature in both the early Church and the Middle Ages. Anselm of Canterbury famously expressed the same thought in *Proslogion*, 1: "I believe so that I may understand" (*credo ut intelligam*). He quotes Isa 7:9 in the form: "Unless I first believe, I shall not understand" (*nisi credidero non intelligam*).

Augustine saw no need for a single standardized translation; he was especially doubtful about Jerome's project of translating from the Hebrew. This hesitation becomes evident in his correspondence with Jerome, dated 395–405 (Aug. letters 28, 40, 67, 68, 71–75,



81, 82), concerning, among other topics, biblical text-forms and translations. First, he was suspicious of the fact that no one could linguistically control Jerome's translation; he even doubted Jerome's competence in Hebrew. Second, for Augustine the Septuagint was authoritative. In these letters, the text of Isaiah is not discussed.

26.3. JEROME'S VULGATE AND HIS COMMENTARY OF ISAIAH

In this chapter, the focus is on the work of Jerome. His new Latin translation of the Book of Isaiah, based on the Hebrew text, was more reliable than the earlier *Vetus Latina* – translations and eventually replaced them. Moreover, his impressive and learned Commentary on Isaiah transmitted to the Latin readers knowledge that up till then was available only in Hebrew or Greek.

26.3.1. Vulgate

During the fourth century and at the beginning of the fifth, many Latin translations, which were even sometimes contradictory, were in circulation. The poor quality of the Latin language and syntax in these translations, however, was a problem for Latin theologians. Jerome formulated the issue thus: *verum non esse quod variat* (where there is so much variation, that cannot be true; *Praef. Ev.*). Initially, an attempt was made to correct the apparent mistakes with the help of Greek manuscripts. At the same time, however, a growing awareness of the differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew text, mainly through the work of Jerome, threw the status of the Septuagint into question.

Jerome started his work, which he said was on the request of Pope Damasus, in 383, by revising existing translations of the Gospels against the best Greek manuscripts.⁶ His versions became widely accepted, but also received criticism (letter 27.1 to Marcella). When it comes to the Old Testament, Jerome started his revision around 387, but with the help of Origen's Hexapla and the works of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. It is not clear whether he revised the whole Old Testament in this so-called *Hexaplaric Recension*; only Psalms, Job, Song of Songs, fragments of Proverbs, and the prologues to these books are preserved, as well as (in his commentaries) some parts of the prophets. This Psalter is preserved under the name "Psalterium Gallicanum" (because it became popular in Gaul) in the Vulgate. It was the standard psalter in liturgical hours until 1986 and is the basis of Gregorian chant.

⁶ For Jerome and his methods in translation, see Jay, *L'Exégèse de saint Jérôme*; Brown, *Vir Trilinguis*, 87–111; Kieffer, *Jerome: His Exegesis*, 663–681.

Working with Origen's Hexapla, however, made Jerome critical of not only Latin translations but also the Greek texts behind them. He thus realized the importance of the *Hebraica veritas*—that is, the Hebrew original. Beginning in about 390, he translated the whole of the Old Testament from the Hebrew. The deuterocanonical books were not included in this version. The importance of the Hebrew text was not understood in the Latin West before Jerome and was not easily accepted even when his arguments for its use became known.⁷

With his translation from the Hebrew, Jerome did not intend to produce a text for liturgical use but a scholarly work instead. He used his new translations mainly in his scientific works, but in other texts, he used the Septuagint too.⁸ Jerome intended to give a high-quality translation of the Old Testament in order to reach a better theological understanding of the Holy Scripture. Instead of doing a word-for-word-translation, he sought to translate “sense-for-sense” (letter 57.5). His knowledge of Hebrew was, for his time, extraordinary and sufficient to produce good-quality translations, and he often refers to *veritas* (“truth”; even *terminus technicus* for original text); however, he also used older Greek and sometimes even Latin translations in preparing his translation. Jerome called himself *vir trilinguis*—that is, fluent in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew (*Ruf.* 3.6)—and certainly his capacity to work in these languages was far better than any of his Christian contemporaries.

But if Jerome did not intend to displace the Septuagint, others thought that he did, and his new translation was received with suspicion and criticism. Augustine, Rufinus, and others reacted critically and defended the authority of the Septuagint. Later, Augustine accepted the Hebrew text as inspired, but he still emphasized the importance of the Septuagint. Over time, Jerome's translation gained increasing acceptance, perhaps more because of its superior language than because it was based on the Hebrew text. Cassiodorus (d. 585) still used it mainly as a tool (*Inst.* 1.15.11); Gregory the Great (d. 604) allowed the use of both old translations and the Vulgate (*Mor.*), but in the writings of Isidore of Seville (d. 636), the Vulgate was preferred (*Eccl. off.* 1.12.8). In the eighth century, at the time of Charlemagne, the Vulgate was finally incorporated in the Alcuin's Bible (except for the Psalms). It was, however, first the Tridentinum (1546) that declared the Vulgate to be the authoritative version. Since then, the text of the Vulgate has been corrected and updated, most recently in *Nova Vulgata*, a new critical edition published in 1969.

26.3.2. Jerome's Translation of Isaiah

Jerome calls the book of Isaiah for *grande volumen* because of its size—although he uses the word *volumen* we cannot be sure that he had it in the form of a scroll; he is inconsistent in his use of *codex* and *volumen* (*Comm. Isa.* 8.1–4). He translated Isaiah in 393–394,

⁷ Brown, *Vir Trilinguis*, 55.

⁸ Brown, *Vir Trilinguis*, 61–62.



together with the other prophets. In a letter to Pammachius (letter 49.4), he urges him to read his new translation and to compare it with old translations.

26.3.3. Jerome's Commentary on Isaiah

Jerome first translated Origen's nine homilies on Isaiah. In 397, Jerome had written a commentary on the ten visions in Isa 13–23 and dedicated this work to Bishop Amabilis. This work was later included in the Commentary on Isaiah, which Jerome wrote in 404–410 and dedicated to Eustochium, a noblewoman who, with her mother Paula, had followed Jerome from Rome to Bethlehem and established a convent there.⁹ Paula had died 404.

This commentary consists of eighteen books, all of which begin with an introduction. In the commentary, Jerome explains his new translation and comments on the text mainly from a historical, but often also from a theological point of view.¹⁰ Quite often, he discusses the texts of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. In his work, Jerome used interpretations from Origen, Eusebius, Apollinaris, and Didymus, and thus brought their thoughts to Latin-speaking readers.

26.4. SOME CENTRAL TOPICS IN THE RECEPTION HISTORY OF ISAIAH IN LATIN TRADITIONS

In this chapter, some important topics, such as the person of Isaiah, Messianic promises and Christology, ecclesiology and the polemics against the Jews, pilgrimage, and liturgy, are presented as examples of how the Latin translations of Isaiah were used.

26.4.1. The Person of Isaiah in Latin Texts

In Latin traditions, the author of the book of Isaiah is regarded as one person, the prophet who lived in the eighth century BCE. Even if the book of Isaiah does not reveal the fate of the prophet, later traditions about it were known even in the West. Early on, Isaiah was identified as the prophet in Heb 11:37 who was sawed in half. This tradition is known, for example, in Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 8, and in the Latin translation of the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah*, and is called by Jerome the “most reliable tradition of the Jews” (*Comm. Isa.* 15.57.1–2). Even in *Vitae prophetarum*, Isaiah is named among the six so-called Martyr-Prophets, most of them presented together with references to

¹⁰ Childs, *Struggle*, 96–99.

the way they died, those responsible for their death, and their burial place (this work was translated into Latin, possibly in the seventh century). The martyrdom of Isaiah became a popular theme, even in western Christian art.

The prophet Isaiah is also seen as an example of patience (Tert., *Pat.* 14.1) and courage (Hilary of Poitiers, *Contra Constantium imperatorem* 4; Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 9.25). Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636) quotes Jerome and calls Isaiah “an evangelist rather than a prophet” (*evangelista potius quam propheta*). Isidore adds that Isaiah’s prose in his book is good (Isidore, *Etym.* 6.2).

26.4.2. Messianic Promises and Christology

One of the main reasons there was a need for a reliable Latin translation of the Old Testament was its use in discussions with the Jews. Problems in early translations became apparent, especially when prophecies of the Messiah were discussed. The main topics concerning the Messianic promises and Christology in the book of Isaiah were the virgin birth (Isa 7:14) and the idea of Christ as the suffering servant (Isa 42:1–7; 49:1–9; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12). The Latin authors inherited their Christological reading of these passages from the New Testament and from Christian Greek theologians. A rich collection of Christological proof-texts from the book of Isaiah is found in Cyprian’s *Testimonia*, book 2.

Because Isa 7:14 was understood early as a prophecy of the virgin birth, it is no wonder that several translations had already been produced before the Vulgate. In the *Vetus Latina* edition, the presentation of these texts and their use spans several pages. In these translations, the Latin word for “virgin” is not problematic; all of them follow the LXX and use the word *virgo*. Jewish interlocutors, however, could and did claim that this passage does not prove virgin birth. Therefore, Jerome lengthily explains this translation in his Commentary on Isaiah.¹¹ He admits that earlier Christian commentators had not been able to defend the Christian interpretation against the Jews, and then takes up the task. He studies all Old Testament passages that contain the word *almah* (עלמה) and notes that Jewish translators regularly translate it as “young woman”—except in the Septuagint. Then he shows, even using Punic language to help, that in Hebrew *almah* does not mean only “young woman” or “virgin” but has a double meaning—both “hidden” and “marriageable”—and thus, a “hidden-away-virgin” of marriage age.

Another central topic in the Christological interpretation of the book of Isaiah is the suffering servant, above all, Isa 53. The existence of multiform translations of this passage points to its importance in early Christian use of the Old Testament, and at such an early stage that certain central concepts did not yet have a fixed translation. The translators chose, for example, different words for *doxa* (Isa 53:2, הדר): *gloria*, *claritas*, *honor*, *decor*, and for *hamartia* (Isa 53:4–5, חלי): *imbecillitas*, *peccatum*, *infirmetas*, *languor*, *scelus*. Isa 53 has also had a great impact on Christian liturgy and hymns. For example, *Agnus*

¹¹ See Childs, *Struggle*, 95, 99.



Dei qui tollis peccata mundi is based both on John 1:29 and Isa 53:4. The verb *tollere*, meaning both “take away” and “carry,” is not found in African texts of this Isaian verse, but it appears in the Latin translations in European texts and Jerome’s Vulgate.

26.4.3. Ecclesiology and the Polemics against the Jews

The book of Isaiah was often used in texts dealing with ecclesiology and polemics against the Jews. Most notably, prophecies about Zion were employed for these purposes. The Church was identified with Zion and the people of God, whereas the Jewish people were seen as rejected. Another common use of the text of Isaiah was to locate adjectives the prophet used that were critical of the Jewish people, and to apply them in anti-Jewish rhetoric.

One of the passages often quoted by the Latin-speaking theologians to clarify the relation between the old covenant and the new, between old Jews and Christians, is the end of Isa 2:3 (Mic 4:2): “The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” Its variants in *Vetus Latina* manuscripts are many, and even Jerome has several versions of it. The differences do not affect the content and use of this half-verse, only the language; they deal with the translation of *logos* and the tempus and the choice of the verb meaning “to go out.” The translations of Tertullian, Pseudo-Cyprian, Cyprian, and Jerome may serve as examples; the existence of so many alternatives shows the centrality of this passage.

Tertullian quotes or alludes to it several times, and never precisely in the same translation (*Marc.* 3.21; 3.22; 4.1; 5.4; *Iud.* 3.8). It is apparent that he did not feel himself to be bound to any existing translation but either translated himself, quoted freely, or used different translations—the last option being unlikely at the time. About the same time, or a little later, another North African, Pseudo-Cyprian (*Mont.* 1.1; 10.1.3–4), in his *Adversus Iudaeos*, uses the same translation as Tertullian had used in his. Subsequently, Cyprian in *Test.* 10 testifies to what later came to be called the African version. Even Jerome has several variants of this verse, where both the word “to go out” and the word for “word” differ (Vulgate Isa 2:3; *Comm. Isa.* 2:3; 42; 49.9; 60.4).

Another example of the fact that common verses in anti-Jewish argumentation were used in many different translations is Isa 6:9, “Listen with your ears, and not hear/understand, see with your eyes and not see,” as quoted by St. Paul in Acts 28:25–26 (cf. Mark 4:12; Matt 13:13; Luke 8:10). This verse is reminiscent of Isa 7:9. Tertullian has it, “aure audietis et non audietis, et oculis videbitis et non videbitis” (*Marc.* 3.6), Cyprian quotes the same verse in his Isaian quotations about the blindness and hardness of the Jews (*Test.* 3), as follows: “aure audietis, et non intelligetis, et videntes videbitis, et non videbitis” (“Listen with your ears and not understand, see and see, and yet not see”). Jerome quotes and explains this passage in letter 18 to Pope Damasus and combines it with John 12:40–41: “aure audietis, et non intelligetis: et cernentes aspicietis, et non videbitis” (“Listen with your ears and not understand, perceive as you see, but yet not see”). In the Vulgate, he formulated it more elegantly: “audite audientes et nolite intellegere et

videte visionem et nolite cognoscere” (“Listen and listen but not understand, see a vision and know it not”). It is not always clear whether early Christian authors are quoting Isaiah, or Isaiah through Acts.

In the polemics against the Jews, the Christian authors used vilification as a method. Words originally used in inner-Jewish criticism and exhortation to return to God were now twisted to characterize Jews in a negative way.¹² Several of these words were taken from the book of Isaiah. Examples are *derelictus*, *desolatus* (abandoned) Isa 3:26; *durus* (hard) Isa 48:4; *caecus* (blind), possibly based on Isa 29:10; 6:9; and Acts 28:27; and *incredulus* (unfaithful) Isa 65:2. This way of using Isaiah influenced even western Christian art: the Jewish people are often pictured as a blindfolded lady.

26.4.4. Pilgrimage and the Holy Land

In 388 CE, Jerome published *De situ et nominibus locorum Hebraicorum* (“Book on the Sites and Names of Hebrew Places”) a revised translation of Eusebios’s *Onomasticon*. In this work, he offered the Latin translations of many Hebrew names, both of individuals and places. Jerome’s interest in biblical topography is visible in his translations.¹³

In Jerome’s time, and very much with his support, pilgrimages to the Holy Land increased. Not only did Jerome present holy places in his book, but in several letters, he and his disciples also promoted the idea of the holiness of the Land. The noblewomen Paula and Eustochium, friends of Jerome, settled in Bethlehem in 386 CE. Soon after their arrival, they wrote to their friend Marcella in Rome, and urged her to travel there. This letter, preserved among the letters of Jerome (letter 46), is one of the most important documents of early theology of pilgrimage.¹⁴

An important passage in their argumentation for the holiness of Jerusalem was Isa 11:10, which in *Vetus Latina* versions was translated following the LXX, *et erit requies eius honor*, “and his resting-place shall be glorious.” In the above-mentioned letter and in the Vulgate, however, Jerome’s new translation is found: “et erit sepulchrum eius gloriosum,” (and his tomb shall be glorious). Jerome comments on the same passage in *Comm. Isa. 4.11.10*. He explains that the Hebrew word *menuhato* can denote any resting place, not necessarily a tomb, but claims that *requies* and *dormitio* can be used as synonyms for *sepulchrum*, and, interpreted in the light of John 17:15, he understands this verse as a prophecy of the Lord’s Sepulchre in Jerusalem. Therefore, it functions as a motivation for universal veneration of this place and an exhortation of Christians to visit there.

¹² Laato, *Jews and Christians*, 148–154; Laato, “Killing,” 8–9.

¹³ Brown, *Vir Trilinguis*, 134–135.

¹⁴ Laato, “What Makes,” 172–173.



26.4.5. Liturgy and Hymns

The earliest notes of the use of Isaiah in the Christian liturgy relate to the *Trishagion* or *sanctus*, based on Isa 6:3 and Rev 4:8.¹⁵ Both in the *Vetus Latina* and in the Vulgate, the Greek *hagios* and the Hebrew *qadosh* (קדוש) in this passage are translated *sanctus*, *sanc-tus*, *sanctus*. In *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 12 (about 203 CE), however, *sanctus* is not sung in Latin. Instead, in the middle of the Latin text describing a vision of a heavenly court, we find the words in Greek. The most probable explanation for this is that the Carthaginian Church used these words in their liturgy in Greek. This Isaian text was used also in Jewish liturgy and also appears in Greek in Ignatios (Ign. *Ef.* 4.2) and Clemens Alexandrinus (*Strom.* 7.12) but is in Latin in Tertullian (*Or.* 3). Tertullian was bilingual, however, and could have translated these words ad hoc. Common to these texts is the reference to one unison and heavenly voice. Origen and Jerome interpreted *sanctus* in a Trinitarian way.

Jerome, in letters 18A and 18B, interprets the call of Isaiah in Isa 6:1–9, including *Trishagion*. The passage is explained thoroughly, both historically and spiritually, and both Hebrew and several Greek versions are quoted. He discusses the interpretation of Origen and other Greeks about the identity of those sitting on the throne, and rejects it—it was understood as God the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Jerome claims that it denotes Christ instead, because it says so in John 12:41, and says that “whatever we read in the Old Testament we find also in the Gospel; and what we read in the Gospel is deduced from the Old Testament. There is no discord between them, no disagreement. In both Testaments the Trinity is preached.” The seraphim stand for the Old and New Testaments. The Trinity is proclaimed in both testaments.

The book of Isaiah is richly present in early Latin lectionaries. The sermons of Augustine, for example, give evidence for certain texts of Isaiah (such as Isa 1:10–17; 2:2; 7:14 and 57:13) as belonging to regularly recurring passages.¹⁶ Texts from Isaiah have also influenced many Latin hymns, such as “O radix Jesse,” “O clavis David,” and “O Emmanuel.”¹⁷

26.5. SUMMARY

In early Christianity and in medieval times, the book of Isaiah was considered one of the most important Old Testament books. Latin translations of the passages that were central for Christians emerged as soon as the Christian message was presented in the Latin language. The existence of many parallel translations of these passages, presented in *Vetus Latina*, suggests that these were first translated ad hoc, for the purposes of preaching

¹⁵ Werner, *Genesis*, 19–32; Sawyer, *Fifth Gospel*, 51, 60–61.

¹⁶ Margoni-Kögler, *Die Perikopen*, 56; 105; 109; 243; 432.

¹⁷ Sawyer, *Fifth Gospel*, 56–57.

and liturgy. These early translations survived in ecclesial use in hymns and liturgy long after the general acceptance of Jerome's high-quality translation, the Vulgate.

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